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INSCAPE

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Special Delivery

Tony Bracke and Ryan Hardesty

night falls on the City. The City is a city of the future (swarming city, city filled with dreams . . .) in a time when the world is sinking into madness. The City is populated by the wealthy who live behind bulletproof windows and greedily devour the remaining resources, and by the wretched poor who have turned to a life of crime and cannibalism in a final effort to eke out some form of existence. Life in the City is constant warfare between those who have and those who want. Only the valiant efforts of a few dedicated people prevent the City from sinking into total chaos. Our story is about one of those valiant people, a man called Mercury.

Mercury was bored. Leaning back, he stared at the receptionist, trying to sneak a glance down her well-filled shirt as she bent over to scratch her ankle. Some days he would sit in the office for hours and others he would be constantly on the go. Today was a sit-here-trying-to-pick-up-the-receptionist kind of day. He hated these days (probably because he was never successful).

"Hey, Candy," Mercury said, trying to sound nonchalant. "Why don't you unplug the phone and bring that bodacious bod of yours over to my side of the room?"

"Why don't you unplug your hormones and toss that badassious bod of yours out the window?" she answered brightly.

Mercury was still deciding whether or not to try again when the red phone on Candy's desk began to ring. Startled, she picked it up and, after a brief whispered conversation (during which she glanced at the clock and scribbled something on a pad of recycled paper) dropped it back in place.

"Warm up the Shadow. You've got a run to make!" she said, bristling with excitement. "I'll prepare the Box."

It's about time, he thought, grabbing his protective jacket and strapping on his laser pistol. Candy ran back into the room, now carrying a small, black box. She handed it to him gently, as if the slightest jar would destroy its fragile contents.

"So who's it for?" asked Mercury, taking it from her with equal care.

"The Minister of Defense," she answered. "The Man said that it's top priority and that no screwups would be tolerated."

"What's the Minister's location?"

"The Street of Thieves, East Quarter."

"Damn, that's all the way across the City!" Mercury groaned, barely concealing his dismay.

"I know it's going to be difficult—"

"And dangerous," he added.

"And dangerous. But you have to get it there in 30 minutes or The Man is going to have both of our asses."

"Have I ever let you down before?" Mercury asked, flashing his infamous smile in an attempt to ease both their fears.

"Yes, twice this week already. So don't let me down again, huh Merc?"

"You bet, Candy," he said, thinking 30 minutes, 30 minutes, 30 minutes!

"And don't forget this," she said, handing him the piece of recycled paper with the full address scribbled on it. "And Merc," she said as he turned to leave. "Be careful out there."

Mercury blew her a kiss as he dashed out the door.

He took the express elevator to the basement, fumbling in his pockets for the keys. The elevator clanked to a halt, and the battered doors slowly opened, revealing the Shadow.

Mercury smiled when he saw the car, remembering other runs they had made together. It was black as liquid night. The florescent lights made it shine like the Devil's smile. It was 4,000 pounds of molybdenum-plated technology, armed with every defensive and offensive weapon available, powered by twin Davidson super turbo IV engines and virtually indestructible to anything the Crazies out there could hit him with. It seemed almost too beautiful to be an engine of destruction.

He slid through the narrow hatch and sealed it behind him. Settling into the cushions and strapping himself securely into position, he attached the stimulo-receptors to his forehead and flipped the switch that brought the command module to life. Suddenly, he became the car, as the scanners fed visual/audial/tactile signals directly into his brain. Now he was linked to all of the Shadow's systems, and the vehicle was controlled by his thoughts alone.

Let there be light! he thought, and twin orbs of yellow appeared on the front grill of the Shadow, slicing through the darkness.

Let there be power! he thought, and the weapons system put itself on standby mode.

He smiled at the sense of tremendous power that filled his body/mind, and then he directed the car-which-was-himself out onto the dark streets of the City. He would not be late again.

As he raced through the deserted streets, part of his mind received the input from the scanners and sent out the impulses that controlled the Shadow. The other part drifted into reverie.

He remembered his last run. The Crazies had managed to blockade 4th Street, and by the time he found an alternate route he was too late. The Man wasn't pleased at all. He had given Mercury (for the second time in as many weeks) his you-know-how-much-this-City-needs-the-services-we-provide speech.

"We're the last surviving organization in the City," he said, his thick, hairy arms flailing wildly. "We're all that keeps this miserable place from total anarchy. When we fail, the City fails with us. We are the lifeline that preserves the existence of this rotting corpse of a city. Now get out there and do your job right, or I'll see to it that you never work again."

That meant unemployment, and unemployment meant poverty, and poverty meant becoming just another Crazie or starving to death in some dark alley. It also meant never driving the Shadow again.

No, Mercury thought as the sparsely inhabited buildings of the West Quarter whizzed by, I'll not be late again. Never again!

Mercury / Shadow made good time maneuvering through the debris that clogged the crumbling streets. Oddly enough, his scanners were detecting no activity, not even from the unusually high amount of winos passed out in the gutters. This data scarcely had time to register on his awareness when the car-which-was-himself skidded around a corner, and he saw a heavily armed group of policemen triumphantly circling a burning vehicle.

"Damn police on strike again!" he shouted into the darkness. "I wish you bastards would get back to work and stop blocking traffic with your picketing!"

Mercury / Shadow whirled onto a sidestreet in an attempt to bypass the cops. He couldn't afford to waste time trying to persuade them to let him through instead of killing him. Just as he began to feel that the crisis had been averted, he picked up a barricade blocking his way. Further scanning showed a number of armored police troops waiting behind the barrier. He was wondering what to do when they made his decision for him by opening fire.

The explosive slugs were easily deflected by the molybdenum plating, but Mercury felt their impacts as a series of sharp pains down his left side.

"Scum fools," he muttered, launching the first round of grenades. The barricade exploded, creating a brief shower of falling metal and flesh, and his thoughts directed the surface-mounted laser cannon to fire in a sweeping arc to eliminate anyone who survived the explosion. Mercury / Shadow emerged from the dust and smoke without further opposition and continued down the now deserted street.

Cybernetic readouts informed him that he had lost five minutes in this encounter, leaving him only 13.74 minutes to reach his destination. Mercury switched to maximum power (he could feel a fresh surge of energy swelling deep within him) in an attempt to make up for lost time, hoping he would not run into any more problems. The Black Box had to get to the Minister of Defense on time.

Unfortunately, the streets became increasingly crowded with wreckage and debris, and after a mere 1.93 minutes his data bank informed him that he was seriously behind schedule. His thoughts activated an auxiliary terrain calculator and directed it to search its computerized map of the city for any possible shortcut. He groaned upon detecting the immediate response, and thought, "The only way to cut my time is to duck through an Abandoned Area."

No courier in his right mind wanted to travel through an Abandoned Area; one of those sections of the City that were so overcrowded and violent that the already over-burdened government had abandoned all efforts to control its rabid population, simply warning all citizens to enter at their own risk. Mercury wasn't one of the more cautious couriers. He didn't relish danger, but it never failed to liven up a boring day. He left the flow of traffic and hurtled down the ramp leading to Abandoned Area #5.

The scenery changed immediately. The street became little more than a narrow path, and the surrounding buildings were a definition of the term "decaying tenements." His scanners showed a throng of people scurrying out of his way. Mercury waited for them to do something, knowing that they were not about to let any vehicle pass through unmolested. He felt a small pang of pity for these people, these Crazies as they were commonly called. Driven out of a society no longer capable of supporting all of its members, they had retreated here, to the darkest and most deadly part of the City to make their last stand. They lived on one another, on the weak and old and unwary, and on any fool who happened to blunder into their domain. He could feel them massing in the shadows, waiting for the best moment to strike what they mistakenly thought was just another fool.

As the Shadow drifted around a hair-pin curve, rapidly decelerating in order to stay on the path, they attacked. Crazies on the street, bearing clubs of steel pipe, began throwing themselves at the sides of the Shadow, while others leaped from two and three story windows onto the roof. Mercury knew that they wouldn't be able to get into the Shadow, but they were drastically impeding his progress. Their furious pounding on his surface sent waves of pain through him, not enough to seriously harm him, but more than enough to madden him.

Mercury wracked his brains for a solution. The grenades were useless at such short range. The laser cannon couldn't reach a target pressed against the car. Then, with a hard laugh, he reached out and flipped the manual anti-theft switch. It prevented anyone from bothering the Shadow while it was parked and, when activated, directed a portion of the electrical energy provided by the twin generators through the outer shell of the vehicle.

He cringed slightly as the Crazies clinging to the Shadow screamed and released their holds, 5,000 volts of electricity ripping through their bodies. As the last body dropped limply to the ground, he saw the exit ramp. He launched a grenade to clear the wreckage that blocked it, and, with a sigh, entered civilization once again.

A time check assured him he was nearly on schedule. He would arrive on time, if he hurried. The sleek black car split the night like a silent cannonball speeding toward some unsuspecting target. Mercury's thoughts radioed the Shadow's identification signal ahead, alerting those at his destination of his approach. He couldn't afford to wait while they opened up a way through the fortified walls.

Mercury turned onto the Street of Thieves and laughed with relief and pride as the building came into view, two massive iron gates slowly opening. The Shadow sped through the still-opening barricade and stopped in front of the Minister's apartment building. He experienced a moment of tension as he prepared to disengage from the command module. Shutting down the Shadow always felt like performing a partial lobotomy on himself. Dedication to duty outweighed personal concerns, and he switched off the Shadow's systems with a grimace. He was overwhelmed with a sense of loss as he returned to normal consciousness, and the Shadow reverted to 4,000 pounds of molybdenum-plated steel.

He detached the stimulo-receptors from his forehead with one hand and unhooked the protective webbing with the other. He opened the stasis container with care and, gently, almost lovingly, removed the Black Box. Time was too short for caution now, so he raced into the building and up the narrow stairs, frantically searching his pockets for the piece of recycled paper with the room number scribbled on it.

"Number 207," he mumbled. "That would be at the end of the hall."

He saw that he had only 10 seconds left and ran down the dark corridor as quickly as possible. He found the door, knocked twice, three more times (the prearranged signal) and waited. Three seconds left, two, one . . . and the door opened.

Mercury placed the Black Box on the outstretched hand, smiled his infamous smile, and said: 'Here's your pizza, right on time. Thank you for doing business with Domino's.' He turned away and then remembered The Man's warning. "And have a nice day."

"Hey buddy," the Minister of Defense said, placing a greasy hand on Mercury's shoulder.

"Huh?"

"Where's them beers I ordered?"

"I . . . uh . . . no one . . . I mean," Mercury stammered.

"Didn't bring 'em, didya? Well, tell ya what, I'll give you 40 minutes to get 'em here."

"Fifty," said Mercury, rising to the challenge.

"Forty-five."

"I'll be right back."

He ran back outside, pausing for a moment at the door. The Shadow lay like an eager lover beneath the twinkling stars. Mercury smiled.

The Lesson Plan

Rebecca Staggs

megan Sullivan didn't wait for the alarm to begin this Monday morning. She had rested so confidently that she awoke before the clock had had a chance to bellow its abrupt intrusion. She whistled a nameless tune as she showered, dressed, and fixed her usual dry toast and black coffee breakfast. With the dishes rinsed and in the sink, Megan began to gather her resources for the week. She paused at the laundry room door to see the crumpled mound of clothes piled in the corner. She smiled, remembering how carefully she had chosen those clothes for the weekend.

It had to be perfect. Not conspicuous, but worthy of the task.

After painstaking deliberation, she had decided on the perfect physical accessories. Her father's old coveralls were too large for Megan's slender frame, but the pockets they provided were essential. She had rolled the legs to her knees, enabling her to navigate more freely. Her long, straight brown hair, which she generally wore pulled back in a low ponytail, was held with a red bandana. The red had been a second thought, knowing it was too bright a color, but red belonged as part of her project. Add the black hiking boots, plastic gloves, and back pack, and her wardrobe was complete.

The morning was slipping away. Megan had to hurry in order to be on time.

Enough reflection. My duty has been completed.

She picked up her books, locked the door of her house, hurried to the car, and drove away.

Megan passed through the double doorway of Dalesburg High School at the usual 7:15 a.m. as she had done every day since she had begun teaching five years ago. Mechanically, she made her way to her classroom and went about readying herself and her room for the day's instruction.

Her classroom for science and astronomy was her haven. No one had ever taken teaching as seriously as Megan. No one! The environment had to be instructionally perfect. Every scientific theory on evolution, space exploration, celestial bodies, and physical science covered the walls in some fashion. Megan made frequent reference to Darwin, Einstein, plus numerous astronomers; and their books, pamphlets, and articles crowded the bookshelves. Posters, assignments, and students' completed work covered the bulletin boards. Mobiles of every shape and form hung from the ceiling, depicting constellations and different solar systems. It had been hard work and had taken Megan several long hours after school to get her room in working order, but it was most definitely worth the toil. On this particular morning, the room took on an extra-special glow that made Megan almost burst with ego.

As a most dedicated instructor, she put in several hours of research for her classes every weekend, often spending the entire weekend pouring over reference materials, filmstrips, periodicals, and microfilm at the library in the city. She would sometimes get so involved that she would forget to eat.

The librarian would literally push her out the door so she could close up for the night. Megan's post office box bulged every day with her own magazines and the books she received concerning her work. News of new experiments and studies excited her. All these sources she used as a basis for her teaching.

This week will be special.

She generally avoided socializing with her fellow teachers. Their self-righteous attitudes were usually too much for her to stomach. Their trivial discussions of sports or fashions were of no interest to Megan. She watched only programs pertaining to her expertise. She dressed casually, but neatly. She had some basic styles, and she worked her mode of dress around those.

Today was different. Knowing what the topic of the faculty lounge gossip would be, Megan eagerly stepped into the room.

The teacher's lounge was buzzing with conversation about Friday night's fire, in which a family of five had been burned beyond recognition.

"Those people lived such a common existence," one teacher remarked. "No electricity, no indoor plumbing. The only modern convenience they had was an old pick-up truck that was only used in case of extreme emergencies."

"Shameless," another mumbled.

"Whatever did these people do to deserve such inhuman treatment?" someone asked.

Megan drank in the conversation with great self-satisfaction as she recalled Friday's events. . .

Megan had disliked him from day one. Dean had signed up for her class as an elective.

"Something to fill the day," was the casual way he had put it. He had come to class every day with his pompous attitude and definite ideas on everything.

I'm sure he was possessed. No one ever treated my class with such irreverence.

He shot down every discussion, opinion, and theory ever brought out in class, whether it be Megan's, a student's, or the text's. Megan tried to talk to the boy about his rude behavior, but always he made the same reply.

"We have little need for science or the universe, Miss Sullivan. The simple things in life are best."

I tried to warn you, Dean, but in your stubborn brainwash, you ignored my warnings.

She discussed her students with no one. She regarded them as her responsibility and treated them as such. Thus, she knew that Dean was her "mistake." She planned her remedy for it.

The house stood on the top of a steep hill, at the end of a winding dirt road. Forest-like vegetation surrounded the dwelling, and Megan had to hike more than halfway to the house.

Once inside, she found the interior as meager as the exterior. Old bedspreads covered the sofa and the only chair. The linoleum was so badly

worn in some places that the faded design was illegible. Megan almost tripped over a place that thrust up several inches. The three-room shanty was bare of any type of decoration, but Megan was thankful for its simplicity.

It is so refreshing to watch these possessed creatures sleeping in their devilish surroundings. Soon we'll all be rid of these contaminating vermin, once and for all. It won't be difficult to eliminate this slime.

She had all the necessary equipment in her pack: gasoline, matches, epoxy glue, handkerchiefs, and the chloroform she borrowed from her science lab. Her plan was simple, yet ingenious. While the slime lay in unsuspecting slumber, she would use their steady and even breathing to her advantage. The chloroform served its intent—a means to complete her vigil.

After all her victims were safely unconscious, she used the glue to secure them to their beds, in case they happened to awaken. She stood momentarily gloating in self-indulgent smiling, then continued her task.

It was meant to be. They all slept in the same room, along-side of Lucifer.

After saturating the bedclothes with gasoline, Megan stepped well back and struck two matches. She threw them into her little trail of gasoline while they were still flaring. She was already racing out the doorway when the gasoline-soaked fabrics exploded into flame. The flames glowed unmercifully as they burned each demon one by one. The only regret she had as she watched her unsuspecting prey crackle and disintegrate to charred ruins was that they felt no pain.

They should have suffered. That is what they deserved.

Megan left the teacher's lounge and walked back to class, eager for the day to begin. The first period—his class—was under way when the principal came into the room.

"This is Sarah, Miss Sullivan. She will be in your class for the remainder of the semester."

Sarah took a seat—his seat—and Megan continued her lecture. When the class discussion began, Sarah raised her hand.

"Miss Sullivan," she began, "my family has little need for science or the universe. We feel the simple life is best."

Megan smiled.

The tragedy of Room 769

Brian Hieneman

anyone who has ever visited a men's dorm or ventured into the forbidden zone of a teenage boy's bedroom knows that we men are not exactly noted for cleanliness. In fact, for general purposes, we could say that we men are dangerously untidy. In the yarn I am about to spin I will relate to you the most fascinating event ever to occur on the campus of Cain University.

The best place to begin my story is in the building where most of this noteworthy event took place, Charon Hall. It was 12:30 p.m., on a normal college day. The occupants of room 769 were going about their daily ritual of preparing lunch. Chris and Johnny had been living in room 769 for almost five semesters now and, if the truth be known, had done much surreptitious cooking. Little did they realize the trouble that would soon befall them because of this sin.

Something had made this day special. Was it something atmospheric, a solar flare, a passing comet, or was it simply a macabre twist of fate? Something though had made this day . . . special, for it was on this day that "IT" was spawned. "IT" is the name I chose to refer to the "slubber-yuck" like creature that was brought into existence in room 769.

"IT" seemed like an appropriate name because nothing like it had ever lived before. "IT" was a one-of-a-kind mutant, unique. A mutant whose very substance was the filth from which it was formed. Chris had no way of knowing that that half eaten tuna fish sandwich which had fallen behind his desk 6 weeks ago would have such significance. Nor did Johnny realize that the cheese ridden lasagna pan that he had slid under his bed would change both of their lives.

By a 13th stroke of nature's clock, the chemical reaction began. Somehow a small bit of hairy mold from the long forgotten tuna sandwich had married with the gray, fuzzy "things" in the unwashed lasagna pan. Perhaps a mouse had taken some mold from the sandwich and united it with the slimy moist things in the lasagna pan. Or maybe an ordinary house fly had been the transgressor. However the bond was made, "IT" was the result.

"IT" was vulnerable at first, but his childhood was short. Soon "IT" began stirring about, slowly moving across the floor to the remaining rancid tuna fish. "IT" savored this rotting morsel and knew, in order to survive, he must have more.

In the beginning "IT" would only emerge from his baseboard camouflage at night. During these nocturnal excursions, he had to devour whatever leavings he could find dumped in the trash can or scattered about the room. During the following weeks "IT" continued this late night feasting undetected by his slumbering roommates.

After gorging himself nightly "IT" soon outgrew his baseboard hideaway and was forced to seek new quarters. Now his home was not quite as secure; he was now living behind the footlocker Johnny kept beneath the

bed. "IT" was feeling this insecurity, having nearly been discovered several times. This, coupled with the fact that his food supply was no longer adequate for his increased size, forced "IT" to realize he would soon have to deal with his roommates. He had only to grow some, then he would be ready.

"IT" grew faster and faster getting hungrier and hungrier. In less than a week "IT" was ready to confront the other occupants of 769. By nature's flip of the coin it just happened that Johnny now entered the room. "IT" watched eagerly from beneath the bed. If only Johnny had seen those two devilishly yellow eyes staring at him. If only he felt the presence of the demon that now possessed his room. But it was not to be.

No sooner had Johnny closed the door than "IT" sprang, seizing his unwary prey. A split second was all "IT" needed to wrap four tentacle-like appendages around Johnny's chest. With one swift bone-shattering bite Johnny was decapitated. Then "IT" began to devour Johnny's warm flesh, washing it down with the heavy rich blood that had once pumped powerfully through his youthful body.

By the other side of nature's unpredictable coin, Chris opened the door. Rather than seeing the usual dull green walls of 769, Chris saw something different. Bright red blood and fragments of bone and brain were splattered from floor to ceiling. Amidst this repulsive scene stood the hideous creature "IT".

"IT" now towered over eight feet high and possessed unholy strength. Chris could not possibly fathom what his destiny would be, until... a lightning-fast tentacle flashed across the room and constricted his neck. Then Chris knew his future held only one thing, DEATH!

But death would not come quickly for Chris because "IT" wanted to watch his new prize suffer. Johnny had been lucky his death was swift. Chris was not so lucky; his legs and lower torso were ripped away bite by bite until death mercifully rescued him.

"It" had just finished off the last of Chris's brain when security burst into the room with guns drawn. The first shot pierced "IT's" left eye. He recoiled in pain as the thick gray matter oozed from the socket where a dull yellow eye had once been. The second piece of speeding lead ripped through "IT's" malformed head tearing into his twisted brain and bringing him to the ground.

As "IT" lay dying he wondered what mistake he had made that had cost him his blasphemous existence. "IT" would never know the answer to this question because death had claimed another victim from room 769.

"IT's" mistake was that during the time that he was torturing Chris he had not noticed a terrified resident advisor opening the door to 769. The R.A. had only wanted to investigate the loud noises coming from the room. When he discovered the hellish creature he quickly ran and telephoned security.

Of course the Cain University security officers were skeptical when they first arrived on the seventh floor of Charon Hall. But as they walked

towards 769 they needed no further evidence. The echo of grinding bones and the sound of razor sharp teeth eagerly ripping away at human flesh convinced them that the R.A. was sincere.

Could it happen again? Could two more young men such as Johnny and Chris lose their lives in some similar chain of supernatural events? This is not for us mortals to know. But now the story is told . . . the truth is out. Now we are all of one startling reality: "IT" lived once and "IT" could live again!

Pleasant Dreams!

Reels

Gene Cravens

i

asked my friend who he thought Billy Pilgrim was. He said he didn't know, adding that the name gave him images of Quakers, Indians, and food. I smiled, told him he was close, and left.

Along the road, once the Ohio and Kentucky railroad, built when the hills were mined for their coal, called Cannel, rarely found, and then only in isolated areas of eastern Kentucky; and hampered economically by its too-sudden combustion; now virtually a street, having been blacktopped in 1978 and populated every other minute, I walked alone, following my footsteps toward Mamaw's house and peaceful solitude on her front porch. I like to sit in Papaw's favorite one-seat glider that he got from his Aunt Virney after she died and sway back and forth, dreaming all the while of my future as an artist, and of the day when I give up forever these damn Salem cigarettes.

I started smoking seriously the summer before my senior year in high school. My friend and I were working for the summer as counselors for a youth organization. He had been eating them for years, and I must admit he had a way of inhaling, sort of a long, slow draw that made the burning end seem to come alive with fire, and a casual, almost natural release of carbon dioxide and gaseous fumes that I found irresistible. I had to have one. Then another. And another. And . . . oh, well, the rest is history. I should add, though, that my friend smoked Marlboros, not Salems. I guess he was taken in by their advertisements featuring Tom Selleck or one of his several carbon copies. Not me or my father, who had a plastic valve in his heart and smoked Salems anyway.

My father is a veteran of the Korean War, which has amazing parallels with the Vietnam War, which has enough parallels with the troubles in Central America to suit me. I am Yossarian in peacetime. I seek no trouble and will go out of my way to avoid it. I've been pretty lucky, too, except for the time Otis, my mother's sister's husband and a retired master-sergeant in the U.S. Army, told my sister that he thought I was queer.

The whole mess came about when my mother was in the hospital in Lexington, the health capital of the world, what with four or five major hospitals and too-many-to-name medical clinics and centers scattered about. She had just come out of an eight-hour surgical removing of her female organs. Like too many women, she had had a hysterectomy after doctors had found cancer in her most recent Pap smear. Here she was, balding and hallucinating from the ether, and I was terribly upset. I remember being mad at the world for all its diseases, especially cancer, and visions of death, like the pied-piper march in *The Seventh Seal*, danced in my head, when my sister tells me what Otis had said.

I let the matter slide until one evening about a week later. The whole family had gathered on Mamaw's front porch, and Otis was obviously drunk, shouting obscenities at my mother's sister, who was a bit on the obese side, but, did he constantly have to remind her of it? When I could stand no more of it, I called him out into the yard and tried to get him to

fight. It must have been very comical to the front porch audience, this short, skinny peace-nik confronting this eight-foot tub of sadistic lard, but no one was smiling. Least of all my mother or sister. Anyway, Otis sobered up quite fast and realized what was happening. Without saying another word he walked away and went to bed. We haven't spoken since.

Words are futile. I think people talk too much when they should be listening and observing, especially the latter. Vision is my favorite of the senses and the one I need most to live. Without it I could not make, or for that matter, see my super 8mm films, and if that's the case, what's the purpose? I mean, some people keep journals or diaries. I make films. Moving pictures that tell stories while permanently recording various, specific incidents in the lives of my family and myself.

Mamaw is a great actress and was, in fact, the first star to emerge from my many reels. She never failed to entertain and would wiggle, giggle or even hula-hoop if the occasion arose. Most of my work is dramatic now, and Mamaw prefers comedy, so I collaborate with my friend. He also has a strong visual sense although he doesn't read much.

We were shooting a film called "Unstuck in Time," a heavy, futuristic piece about a young man, played by my friend, who buys a home computer that has been programmed by aliens from the planet Claire. When the young man unlocks the secret code he is able to move about in time and space, free and unaffected. Anyway, we were shooting this film and my friend brings up Billy Pilgrim. It seems his father knew a guy named Pilgrim during World War II. He met him in Dresden, Germany, after the massive bombing of that city in which Pilgrim was a half-starved, half-crazed prisoner of war, and he was a bombardier.

Could this be the same Billy Pilgrim I had inquired about, he wondered, resuming his fictional travels through time.

I'm Wired

Ryan Hardesty

●
I

'm wired. I've been sitting in this little room for days, living on Coors and Marlboros and potato chips. I'm so dirty I can smell myself. The stereo has been playing for three straight days, a loud companion for my misery. I can't remember what day it is. Like I said, I'm wired.

I looked out my window yesterday, and it was snowing. Hard. I pulled down the shade and had another beer. About 6 a.m. this morning I looked out again. Still snowing. Only harder. Good. It's snowing inside my head too, a thick white snow settling heavily over the dark sore places, comforting and cold. No sun's ever gonna shine on me again. I'm frozen for good.

All day I keep the shades down and the lights off. I'm waiting for the night. In the darkness I can almost feel alive, almost feel at ease. Almost.

Here's a memory for you.

I'm driving through a light snow, too fast, too reckless, on my way to see her. She's waiting at her mother's house, standing by the window, waiting for the first glimpse of headlight as I round the curve and slide into the driveway. It's three in the morning, December. She's worried about me. She's the only person who ever worried about me. She loves me.

Somehow I manage to keep the car on the slickening road. I pull into the driveway, and she comes running to meet me, melting in my arms and melting into me. I kiss her, again and again, standing in the dark and snow, kissing as if today were the last day on earth.

Enough of my memories. I don't like memories anymore. Memories don't help me through anymore. Memories are like ice, melting slowly away and away. She's gone, see? Gone from my mind like yesterday's rain. Wanna see some scars?

I picked up my guitar and tried to play. My fingers felt stiff, frozen, and they couldn't find the strings. For the first time in my life I couldn't wring any music from the damned thing. I couldn't make it sing.

My guitar got me through a lot of lonely nights. When Mom and Dad were fighting through another angry summer, I could always play loud enough to drown out my father's curses and my mother's screams. The music would fill me, transport me to a darker place of sound where I could forget. And when I lost my first girl, some pretty cheerleader whose name I can't quite remember, I only remember the sweaty taste on her lips coming home from a football game in the dark back seat of a rattletrap school bus, and how soft her breasts were, and the smell of her perfume. When I lost her I cried for a while. But I eventually played her right out of my soul. And when I hated the world for hating me, when I hated myself for being me, skinny and ugly and frightened and sad, no matter how miserable my life became, I could always sit on the ground and look at the stars and play my blues away.

But tonight she won't sing for me. Even my music has gone, and I guess that really makes me alone, for the first time in my too-long life.

So I'm playing the stereo instead, letting the dreams of other sad heroes carry me along. I'm playing it loud, trying not to think. Thinking brings memories and memories make me afraid.

I'm on the ninth floor. The ground is a long way down. I could jump if the wind was right.

Four summers ago. I always hated summers. Summers meant long, hot days alone in my room, and only swimming and drinking had any meaning. I had too much time to think about being alone. I also had plenty of time to play guitar. The nights were good for watching the stars and sleeping outside. I always dreamed one night I'd see a falling star and wake up on Mars to see good old John Carter coming to greet me. Or maybe a spaceship would land and offer me a ride to Rigel. I could sing for them as they showed me the universe.

Anyway, four summers ago. I discovered power drinking. Greg and I would get beautifully drunk and cruise to the public swimming pool, looking for girls. We'd lie in the sun, afraid to go near the water because if we fell in we'd probably drown. And there she sat, alone by the water, dark and wet the way she always was in my dreams. Lisa. Too drunk to care I said hello and shoved her in the water. She pulled me along. We kissed, just like that, as if she'd been waiting all her life for me too. I believe in love at first sight. I loved her then. Lisa.

But that was four summers ago. That was when I was seventeen and foolish, as the old folks say. I went crazy. I showed her my music and I showed her the stars.

"I'd never really noticed them before," she said one night after we'd made love.

And we loved with a love that was more than love. Edgar Allen Poe. I like him because he understands the beauty of the night. And the terror. No one else really does. No one understands how in the darkness you're alone. All the world is dead. You're alone. No eyes that stare and smiles that criticize, no crowds of mindless children pretending love. In the darkness with the stars and the ever-changing moon, then a man can truly live. Maybe I'm a vampire, a dead thing roaming the shadows, hiding from light and life and love. Death, old friend eternal, right?

And we lived in the night. Nights were for driving drunk going nowhere, parking in some muddy field to make love for an hour uncomfortably, sitting under a tree planning lies and pretending that we could live together in the daylight world. Nights are for lovers, and for loners, and for dreamers.

Always the dreamer, I went for my dream. I left home, I left Lisa, I left everything I'd ever loved or feared to follow my dream. I joined a band. We called ourselves The Midnight. We went to the city to make it big. We were gonna be the biggest thing since Springsteen. Yeah, and we'd live for ever on a piece of black vinyl going round and round and round.

I spent a lot of sleepless nights struggling to a decision. I tried to convince Lisa to come along, but this was one dream she couldn't share. She wanted to get married, have kids, buy a house near her mother while I

worked God-knows-where doing God-knows-what. I couldn't stay at home. Ever since I can remember I wanted to run, to be anywhere but there, to make it big in the big world. Besides, dreamers and guitar players are seldom qualified to do real work.

One night after making love, I said goodbye. I said I had to follow my dream, my only dream, or die. I said I'd come back in a big car and take her away. We cried all night together. In the morning the boys loaded up the equipment in Jimmy's van, and we left for New York City, the land of a thousand chances.

So here I am, alone in a hotel room, drinking and smoking and still dreaming. The band didn't make it. They've all gone home to their families, to the real world. Lisa got married to Greg. She's pregnant, living in a small apartment downtown and growing old too young. I had nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to be, so I stayed here, looking for another way out.

I'm here with the darkness, my old friend, and a cold wound that will never heal. I open the shade. The snow has stopped. I can see the stars again; cold and distant dreams and hard promises. The wind is almost right. A falling through darkness and then the long goodbye.

I hope it's dark in hell.

Chains

Peggy Ann Wilburn

t

he old dog had been tied up in the same spot for ten years. A small circle of bare brown earth was his world. He was well fed, and his master would pet him on occasion: but, like the dog, he was getting old and would venture out less and less.

Upon the master's death, the house was sold to a young man who loved animals. He took the old dog for his own. Being young and full of life, he thought it cruel to keep an animal confined in such a manner. One day, he quietly untied the leash and set the old dog free.

How great to be free! He jumped and ran like a young dog again. He loved his new master and he loved life.

But the days dragged on. He could feel that death was near. He could feel it in his old bones. His activity decreased, and he was no longer responsive to his new master.

During the week prior to his death, oddly, he confined himself to the perimeters of his old prison. He would look out, but he would not cross over the line where green grass met dead earth.

His death came quickly. He lay down as he had done so many times before. Years had taught him the uselessness of fighting chains.

POETRY

t

he Downward Spiral of Redemption

after it had become obvious that the gutter-sprawling gods
 were to rise to the occasion no more
 after it had become obvious that the death-worshipping devout
 had been abandoned to existential solitude by their phallic
 omni-potent lover
 and the swarming masses of the city were to be
 hailed no more by the ghost
 after it had become obvious that the dead were to rot and the
 cycle of decomposition and biodegradation was the sum totality
 of heaven and hell and the three who were one were one
 in Void
 nature abhors a vacuum and a need arose for a substitute
 institute to execute
 all the authoritarian stances of the staunch
 with god dead and mother unfit due to Oedipal complexities
 we were left with country right or wrong
 right or wrong
 wrong
 anyman's everyman blissfully sighed as the rank filed in
 for deified democracy breeds
 maximum mediocrity

—Tony Bracke



mistaken Identities

His long wavy hair
clashed
with the well-manicured
and pampered lawn.
My sweaty palms
pulled him
to the leather-lined box,
the sitting room,
where my parents
rigidly relaxed.
His smile emits a stench
as smelly as sour sardines
said my father's
nice-to-meet-you-but-you're-not-my-daughter's-type
acquaintance pout.

Late that night
in the bedroom
at a punk's beach-house blow-out
one rough hand caressed my shoulder.
Whiskey-breath whispered
nice-to-meet-you-and-you're-just-my-kind-of-girl
wishful-thinking words
into my willing ears.
I snuffed the candle
and stared
into those eyes that bled
and stained my
starched
white
reputation.

—Vicki Cole

POETRY

a**Salesman's Nightmare**

Bow tie
neatly tucked in place
Enhancing
a mannequin's face
So dead—staring into space

Man's creation
his toy
(such a fine baby boy)

To sit in chairs
advertise
to sullen faces
that stare
So dead—staring into space

Macrame eyes
both glued on
(such a fine baby boy
you got there)

Head lolls
not glued on
Outfitted in
300 dollar suit

Advertise
to sullen faces
that stare
Through
plexi-glass windows
Day and night

Advertise, advertise
to sullen faces
that stare

POETRY

23

Smiling brightly
but glued in place
macrame eyes
staring into space

The All American Boy
not a blemish on his face
Man's creation
A mechanical toy
(Such a fine bright son
you got there)

Plaster of paris
pseudo-flesh
reacts to
heat and cold
grows sweaty
and crumbles

Plaster of paris flesh
Dusts 300 dollar suit
with bow tie complete
lies
wrinkled and caked
with what use to be his neck

ashes to ashes
dust to dust

(such a fine bright boy
you had there)

—"Gaela"

POETRY

k

Keep To The Beat, Soldier

in orderly fashion
stay in step
Keep To The Beat, Soldier

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

eyes forward
catch the gleam
of spit-shined boots

Keep To The Beat, Soldier

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

on parade grounds
uniform designed
in Pentagon's Special
Camouflage

(Will Help You Keep Alive)

models from Anywhere, USA

in orderly fashion
stay behind me

rain slithers
mud sucks
what once was polished boots

no order, no fashion

Incoming Incoming

run push shove
(Keep To The Beat, Soldier)

zero two niner
zero two niner

request help
request help

zero two niner . . .

—“Gaela”

POETRY

1

lover's Song

a box sits
polished
the grain
worn smooth
from continual touch
atop two dancers
locked in limbo
touching
but not touching
whirring, chiming
a lover's song

a head cocks
vacant eyes smile
vainly reaching
for one another
but not touching

the lover's song
winds down
faint tinkling
echoes

eyes smile no more
(Vacancy, Vacancy)
(Color TV, 25.95 double)
blinking

rising
sedately moving
sweeping rose petals
dried dead crumbled

POETRY

27

nodding
eyes smile
at friends
who hide in corners
following
a path
walked upon
(by many)
to and fro
to and fro
in decaying
satin shoes

dancers
locked in limbo
touching
but not touching

the box
trembles
whirring, chiming
a lover's song

pleased
eyes smile
vacantly
gazing beyond
wallpaper
yellowed
with age
(candles glow)
(shadows cast
haloing
two embraced)

POETRY

the box
whirring, chiming
a lover's song

as dancers reach
in suspended time
touching
but not touching

embracing
but not embracing

alone, alone
coupled alone
the lover's song
whirring, chiming

(Till Death Do Us Part)

winds down

—"Gaela"

POETRY

29

t

he Seduction

hush now

bleeding child,
your tears I wipe with my fingertips
and lick the salty wet drops of your crying

you are not dying

bleeding child,
only surrendering to sweat stained bedsheets
the fruit of your passing youth,
this blood a symbol of your
initiation into womanhood.

hush now

bleeding child,
come sit on my knee
with your pale arms on my shoulders,
tears on my shoulders,
and let me taste the sadness that I know you feel.

yes child, this is real,

my lovely bleeding flower
this delirious hour
has been the time of your undoing,
and the gem I stole in darkness
can never be replaced
by all my words of sorrow.

hush now

bleeding child,
the time for tears is over,
gone in the night in one swift moment
as we together ripped away
the thin veils of innocence
and hurled you into
the world of hard experience.

hush now

bleeding child
weeping flower
forget the night, the painful hour,
come to the window and watch the rain,
the sky that understands your pain
can heal the sorest soul.

come my child, my bleeding child and together we'll wait for
morning.

—Ryan Hardesty

POETRY

a

t the Playground

I

Across the road the school
beginnings
remember first kisses and black eyes?
remember falling . . . ?

II

Two oaks protect
them as they play
from eyes like mine
hopscotch
baseball
tag and jacks
her dress flies in the wind as she swings
arcing the morning
chains she grips
with sweaty hands
and if she fell . . . ?

III

Two boys running
legs extending
arms extending
race the wind between the trees
to stop and turn
explode in color past my car
laughter
screams of pleasure
chains of the fence
she presses her face against
protect her from men like me.

POETRY

31

IV

To dream
and grip the wheel
with sweaty palms
to love
and loathe myself
soft palms and pigtailed
questions
sighs and screams of pleasure
drunk to die
forget
repent
I love her tender face
I love her tiny breasts
I love to watch her playing tag
to dream
through chains
her pale face pressed against
a nightmare
if she fell . . . ?

V

Across the road the school
beginnings
remember first kisses and caresses?
remember falling . . . ?

—Ryan Hardesty

POETRY

d

ionysus trapped in

Dionysus trapped in
(four by four by four)
columns arches indecisions
and ancient prophets roam the deserts
for a hungry god.
Dionysus trapped in
(three by three by three)
foggy morning children rise for school and breakfast
lose their notebooks where the mud runs,
momma praying for her vision
sends them off with hugs and lunches
as the mushroom grows against the sky.
Dionysus trapped in
(two by two by two)
under the moonlight
god goes searching for his
offshoot resurrected child,
and the grapes of day
die thick on vines
to be eaten by the dead
who are always hungry and annoyed.
Dionysus trapped in
(one by one by one)
drop like matchsticks charred and pointless
into smelling heaps and husks of bone.
Curses chants and invocations
calm the god who moves the sun;
a dark girl breaking eggs on the sidewalk
as her fair-haired brother bleeds;
hear the green god come running draped in olive,
drunk again.

—Ryan Hardesty

POETRY

33



o Be at Home

To be here,
To be where the ebony night merges with
The black living waters of the ocean.
To see the rumbling, white-capped waves
Slowly form and rush from that

Great nocturnal wall of mystery.
To feel the wind, wet and salty,
Blowing in your hair, mouth and nostrils.
Taste the Ocean!
Close your eyes and experience it!

To be here,
To stare into oblivion at
The great abyss that touches the dark corners of your mind.
To hear the sound of the waves—

Hypnotic music that steals your thoughts away.
To have your consciousness surrounded by nothingness.
In the sky or in the ocean?
You cannot tell,
For the stars are shimmering on the water.

To be here
To stand on the edge of the unknown.
To cram your hands into your pockets
To pull your coat tighter about you,
To feel the little security offered by land.
To be in awe of the
Untold, unseen, unexplained
Wonders of the deep.

POETRY

To be here,
To be where the faithful waves
Roll up on the shore in perpetuity.
To feel the shifting sand
Tug at your legs,
As your feet sink
Deeper and deeper, with each wave.

To be here,
To be brought back to wet reality
By the foaming water
Weighting down
The cuffs on your rolled up jeans.

To be here,
To be at home.

—Denise Hurd

INSCAPE



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